

State to meet soon with Kettleman mothers

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, April 16, 2010

State health officials on Thursday promised they will start next week the process of interviewing Kettleman City mothers whose babies were born with birth defects, a process that they say might take several weeks or even months.

But that promise did little to quell frustrations for concerned residents, who said enough talks and called for action and results at a community meeting held by state agencies ordered by the governor to investigate what might be causing the apparent health anomaly.

Two months have passed since the state Department of Public Health and California Environmental Protection Agency announced the investigation into abnormally high birth defect cases in the impoverished farm worker community, located just three miles away from the West's largest toxic waste facility.

"We need answers. There is something going on in Kettleman City," said Guadalupe Alatorre, 53, a life-long Kettleman resident. "I'm not blaming anybody, but we need to research and find out what's going on. We can't have a meeting after a meeting after a meeting; we need to do something about it now. There's a lot of pain, especially for all those mothers.

"We need to find the truth," she said.

Her emotional appeal prompted an apology from Dr. Kevin Reilly, chief deputy director of CDPH, who said the investigation is well overdue and the department's response has been slow.

"Our investigation should have started. We wanted to try to be inclusive, but we delayed it too long. I agree," Reilly said. "We think we have a good strategy and have a good study, but we've talked about it too long. It's time to do it."

Despite short notice, for which state officials apologized, a crowd packed the Kettleman City Elementary School cafeteria Thursday night, as residents came for an opportunity at one-on-one conversations with officials and an update on the birth defect investigation.

For state officials, the main purpose was to seek a final dose of public input before they would go out and begin the interviews.

Community input is key to finalizing the questionnaire officials will use as an instrument for the face-to-face survey of mothers of birth defect babies born during the last three years, Reilly said.

"Their input is critical for us to have the best possible questionnaire," Reilly said. "This is the best chance to find answers for this community. It's really important for us to hear what they want to see in our questionnaire."

CDPH has so far confirmed nine birth defect babies born to mothers who live in Kettleman City during the period from late 2007 to date, including one in 2007, four in 2008, three in 2009 and one so far this year. The agency has also identified two cases from 2008 involving two mothers who live out of county but had previously spent time in Kettleman City, but officials have yet to establish clear links between those cases and Kettleman.

Activists want to go beyond the last three years, especially in light of one mother living out of state who has recently come forward with information that her son was born with birth defects in 1991 when she lived in Kettleman City.

They are now demanding the state release the number of confirmed birth defect cases for each of the 22-year period that the state's birth defect monitoring program has been in existence.

The department has so far declined to release such information.

Reilly explained Thursday that unless these mothers come forward and are willing to talk publicly of their children, the department has no choice but respect the mothers' confidentiality.

In a different part of the meeting, a new concern was raised regarding childhood cancer rate in Kings County.

A U.S. EPA-hired expert, who is acting as an independent community advisor, said a preliminary review of national data indicate that the incidence of acute lymphocytic leukemia - the most common type of childhood cancer in the region - is significantly higher in Kings County than the rest of the state.

"As a result of my analysis, it raises a question to me: Why did that happen?" Daniel Wartenberg, an epidemiologist at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey. "There's a concern about birth defects. Now it looks like we have some sense of what's going on with childhood cancer. That raises an issue: why."

Kettleman City-specific data, however, revealed nothing unusual, Reilly responded later in the meeting.

"We looked at Kettleman City specifically, then we compared the numbers to Kings County and statewide numbers as well," he said. "We looked at 30 different cancers, and we did not find rates higher in Kettleman City than any of those comparison groups."

Thursday's meeting came also at a time when the community's concern level is heightened by last week's news that federal officials found improper disposal and storage of toxic chemicals known as PCBs at Waste Management's Kettleman Hills Facility. PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, have been linked to cancer and birth defects.

Waste Management has been given 60 days to bring itself to compliance, but company officials said they immediately corrected most of those issues. The company is in the process of renewing its license to continue receiving PCBs.

Many residents blame the landfill for their health problems, but the company maintains that its facility is safe.

Still, Waste Management officials came to the meeting to support the community's call for results.

"The community deserves answers. We agree with the community," said Kit Cole, company spokeswoman. "The community needs results."

Earth Day celebration shows it's easy to be green

Events get children out in the sun and dirty, teach about environment

By Keith Reid, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Monday, April 19, 2010

STOCKTON - Christian Ocana scooped a handful of topsoil in his 4-year-old hand and set it gently into a coned plastic cup.

A single tomato stem rose from the black dirt, and San Joaquin County Farm Bureau employee Kory Caltrera promised the youngster the plant would offer plenty of the juicy red fruit to last into the summer.

Christian and his family accepted the free tomato plant at the city's Earth Day celebration Sunday at Victory Park.

More than 100 environmentally friendly vendors set up booths at the park and offered the public a glimpse of their products that are designed to enhance recycling efforts, preserve the local waterways and reduce the carbon emissions that threaten Earth's long-term viability.

Organizers used social networking websites such as Twitter and Facebook to promote the event, and the effort did result in a few new faces at the 22nd annual event.

"This is just a great way to learn. We're learning about different plants, and about energy ... just enjoying the sunny day," said Martin Torres, who attended for the first time with his daughter, Leilani Torres, who had fun roasting "a marshmallow at a sporting good store outdoor exhibit.

Organizers say the event is to promote clean and healthy living. At least one family is hoping to make at least a subtle change.

"I think we're going to go home and do some planting," Stockton resident Maria Olivas said.

For more information on Stockton's efforts to promote Earth Day, visit www.livegreensanjoaquin.org.

Ag pilot says Modesto turned him down for Earth Day booth

By Leslie Albrecht

Modesto Bee, Saturday, April 17, 2010

Don't call Dave Stein a crop-duster. The 48-year-old pilot is an "aerial applicator." That's the modern term for pilots like Stein who zoom over farmers' fields.

The name isn't the only thing that's changed about his business over the years. Stein thought renting a booth at Modesto's Earth Day celebration today would help educate the public about how aerial applicators, in his view, help the Earth.

But the city denied his request, said Stein, on the grounds that he pollutes the air. Earth Day organizers were unavailable for comment Friday.

Stein says the "polluter" label is a common misconception. "Unfortunately, when a lot of people see an ag aircraft in the sky, the first thing they think is poison and cancer, and that's not what's going on," Stein said. "We do good things for the environment, but nobody knows that."

He's fighting an uphill public relations battle. Exposure to pesticides has been linked to brain cancer, birth defects and miscarriages, according to the Pesticide Action Network.

Stein grows hay and silage corn on his family's farm eight miles east of Modesto. He's been an ag pilot for 30 years.

He says applying pesticides isn't as harmful to the environment as it once was. In the old days, chemicals were powders that drifted easily in the wind. Now, pesticides come in small grains the size of coarse pepper or pebbles. They fall directly onto crops and don't blow around, Stein said.

He says aerial application is more eco-friendly than using a tractor: A plane uses 25 gallons of fuel to spray 150 acres, while a tractor burns four times as much fuel.

Ag pilots also help restore habitat by planting native grass seeds; dump water on dusty roads to control air pollution; and service organic crops with organic materials, Stein says.

His plane plants rice in the Sacramento Valley, feeds honeybees with sugar water and applies sunscreen to keep fruit and nut crops from getting burned.

When people call to complain after they see Stein's plane in action, he makes it a point to visit them and explain what he's doing.

"When I talk to people ... they're relieved," he said. "When I leave these people's yards, they're not mad and we never hear from them again."

He was hoping to bring a similar message to Earth Day. The city invites businesses or organizations that promote eco-friendly products, services or programs, according to the city's Web site. The application for vendor booths reads, "Issues concerning air, land, water and other natural resources affect everyone and the festival is a great place to learn about them."

The free event also provides family-friendly entertainment such as music, food and bounce houses. Not every organization that participates has direct ties to "green" activities. The Bee, the Modesto Nuts baseball team, Comcast cable and Storer Transportation are among the sponsors.

Stein says ag-supporting businesses like his deserve a spot at the event. "If all of agriculture pulled out of the city of Modesto, Modesto would be a ghost town," he said. "The city of Modesto needs to respect ag and realize how important we are."

[Fresno Bee commentary, Sat., April 17, 2010:](#)

Lots of ways to recognize Earth Day

By George B. Kauffman

Earth Day, an annual event initiated by Sen. Gaylord Nelson, D-Wisconsin, began 40 years ago, on April 22, 1970. It focused public attention on pollution and environmental concerns and made "ecology" a household word.

The world's largest secular holiday and the only event celebrated by more than a half-billion people of all backgrounds, faiths, and nationalities, it is sponsored by many national and international organizations with outreach programs showcasing positive contributions that environmental science makes to improve the health of our planet and its citizens.

In response to the activity spurred by the first Earth Day, President Richard M. Nixon helped amend the Clean Air Act of 1970, which has improved our air quality, reducing nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and lead by 46%, 71%, 79% and 92%, respectively.

Tuesdays at 9 p.m., the Sundance Channel continues "The Green," television's first regularly scheduled prime time series dedicated to the environment (www.sundancechannel.com/thegreen/#/homePage). Hosted by Robert Redford, it broadcasts multimedia content focusing on ecology and green living that balance human needs with responsible care for our planet.

On Tuesday, you can view the webcast, "Chill Out: Campus Solutions to Global Warming" (Register at www.nwf.org/campusecology/chillout/broadcast.cfm).

Beginning Wednesday, DisneyNature, which produces environmental and wildlife movies, celebrates Earth Day by releasing "Oceans." A portion of each ticket sold during its opening week, helps establish new marine protected areas in the Bahamas.

The American Chemical Society will observe Earth Day by emphasizing the positive contributions chemistry makes to our environment, reminding us that all our actions and choices impact the health of our planet. A special field, "green chemistry" with its own journal, develops environmentally benign chemical products and processes in the context of renewable resources.

The society's 2010 theme, "Plants -- The Green Machines!," is especially appropriate, considering that our Valley's primary economic activity is agriculture. American Farmland Trust Board Chairman John Winthrop, Jr. stated, "American agriculture is the single largest manager and user of land and water resources in the country. (It) cannot only hasten the accomplishment of our ultimate goal of reducing man-made emissions, but can do so while reducing the overall cost of a climate-change system."

Plants are the ultimate green chemical factories, using sunlight to transform carbon dioxide and water into glucose and oxygen. Thus the sun is the ultimate energy source for our planet, providing energy to grow plants that feed both people and animals.

According to the EPA, agriculture and forestry management are among the most cost-effective, readily available practices to reduce and mitigate carbon emissions, sequestering up to 20% of current greenhouse gases.

As part of "Chemists Celebrate Earth Day," the ACS provides hands-on activities for educators to spice up classroom and laboratory presentations (chemistry.org/earthday), making available new and previously published articles and games and sponsoring an illustrated poem contest for K-12 students and a video contest for college and university students. Submit poem entries to Melissa Golden (278-6822, mgolden@csufresno.edu). Periodicals like the Journal of Chemical Education

(February issue, pubs.acs.org/journal/jceda8) feature articles and experiments to introduce environmental chemistry and green chemistry to students.

Today from 9 a.m.-3 p.m., high school science teachers can participate in a free one-day workshop with lunch and snacks at Fresno State, featuring demos and lectures that they can take back to the classroom, teaching tools for plant chemistry and photosynthesis, and a lecture by a local environmental chemist. Contact Joy Goto (278-2530, jgoto@csufresno.edu).

DVD and Blu-Ray versions of "Avatar," the largest grossing movie of all time, will be released on Wednesday in an effort to spur fans to go green. According to director James Cameron, "Earth Day

Network's commitment and actions to promote a healthy, sustainable planet go hand-in-hand with the themes of 'Avatar.'" DVD buyers can adopt one of the million trees to be planted in 15 countries by the end of 2010.

Hundreds of events will take place globally. The Green Generation Campaign is the focus of Earth Day's 40th anniversary (earthday.net/earthday2010). The Web site also features events taking place in California and worldwide.

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